

International Journal of Maritime History

<http://ijh.sagepub.com/>

Book Review: Anglo-Saxons in the Mediterranean: Commerce, Politics and Ideas (XVII –XX Centuries)

Maria Christina Chatziioannou

International Journal of Maritime History 2007 19: 445

DOI: 10.1177/084387140701900227

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://ijh.sagepub.com/content/19/2/445.citation>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *International Journal of Maritime History* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ijh.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ijh.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Dec 1, 2007

[What is This?](#)

Carmel Vassallo and Michela D'Angelo (eds.), *Anglo-Saxons in the Mediterranean: Commerce, Politics and Ideas (XVII-XX Centuries)*. Malta: Malta University Press, 2007. xii + 236 pp., tables. €20, paper; ISBN 99909-45-44-6.

Why did the British "invade" the Mediterranean in various ways? And what precisely did they expect to find there? Aspirations of political sovereignty, entrepreneurial opportunities and cultural motivation were the major causes that brought the British to the blessed and much desired sea of the ancient and modern world. This collection of essays grew out of a session organized by the editors at the Fourth International Congress of Maritime History held in Corfu in June 2004. In a short time it expanded to a more representative volume, including some commissioned papers. The editors and the authors are also part of the Mediterranean Maritime History Network, established in 2000, whose main goal is to promote relevant studies in vast thematic areas of historical research. The majority of the contributions in this volume deal with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From a total of thirteen articles only the last three are concerned with the twentieth century. All the articles except for two deal with British economic, political and cultural interests in the Mediterranean.

Sicily, as a unique island in the Mediterranean, is well represented with essays by Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis, Salvatore Bottari, Michela D'Angelo, and Rosario Lentini. Its agricultural production and fertility, agreeable natural environment, archaeological pleasures and strategic position made this island attractive to British merchants and diplomats. In the mid-seventeenth century an English merchant established a commercial network in Sicily, speculating in local silk production and political upheavals, thereby launching, in a sense, British trade interests there. Silk exports and other agricultural products continued to attract the British in the following century. Commercial relations were accompanied by strong cultural influences, such as the spread of British-inspired freemasonry and empiricism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Continental Blockade influenced the British presence in the Italian peninsula positively, bringing new merchants and increasing trade with Sicily.

Several essays show that the Mediterranean was a sea *par excellence* for privateers, corsairs and smugglers; this enabled risk-taking locals and "invaders" to interact for several centuries. Scottish merchants had a strong maritime presence as early as the eighteenth century which can be traced through British consular reports. The declaration of Gibraltar as a free port increased the traffic of foreign goods from Europe and Morocco. Tobacco smuggling through Gibraltar in the nineteenth century presents an interesting case that gave birth to a related local industry. Several papers explore the British presence not only in Gibraltar but also in Ionian islands in both a local and an international context.

Late in the eighteenth century the United States established consular relations with the Italian states, mainly for trade, but in the process opening the way for various American cultural pursuits in the Mediterranean. American interest in the *Risorgimento* in Sicily is of particular interest if it can be connected to the American experience of Garibaldi.

The twentieth century papers deal with the organization of the British naval presence, or the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) in the Mediterranean ports of Malta, Haifa and Cyprus and its impact on local societies. The institution of NAAFI, an organization created by the British government to run recreational establishments for the armed forces in Malta, is an interesting example of the shift from

economic to military priorities in the strategic role of Malta (and also of the development of anti-British feelings on the island). British interest in Palestine was also manifested in Haifa's economic importance. The building of the port by the British contributed to the formation of a major technical infrastructure which transformed not only the maritime economy but also the political equilibrium of the area. A third essay on the twentieth century deals with the British naval presence on Cyprus and interweaves British political and naval interest in the area.

Although the volume has an internal cohesion – something that is often difficult to accomplish – a more elaborate introduction by the editors could have explained some of the methodological and thematic choices, especially since both editors are experts (in the maritime history of Malta and Sicily, respectively). New material comes forth in most essays, enabling the reader to probe the interplay of trade and culture, international political competition and the religious conflicts shaped by the presence of the British and Americans in various centres. In the twentieth century the role of the state takes the place of the nation, bringing forth important British colonial and imperial strategies in Mediterranean ports. The various perspectives in this collection allow for a more complete overview of the historical realities in the Mediterranean world.

Maria Christina Chatzioannou

Institute for Neohellenic Research/
National Hellenic Research Foundation
Athens, Greece

Agustín Coletes Blanco (ed.), *Gijón: Puerto Anglosajón*. Oviedo: Ediciones Nobel [www.edicionesnobel.com] for Autoridad Portuaria de Gijón [www.puertogijon.es], 2005. 205 pp., maps, illustrations, photographs (b+w, colour), individual chapter bibliographies. €36, cloth in slip-case; ISBN 84-8459-359-2.

This book continues a line of study of the port of Gijón begun by the port authority, developed by a group of contributors, and edited by Agustín Coletes Blanco. It is an extension of previous studies devoted to the analysis of the different historical stages of the port (Roman age, golden age of transatlantic ships, Spanish Civil War). Gijón is one of the most important ports on the Biscay coast. Although it had an intermediate position within the national ranking, its location enabled it to play an important role as a conduit for the trade of Asturias with Northern Europe, particularly with the United Kingdom. One of the persistent arguments in the text is the port's enormous significance for the urban and regional economies; the evolution of the city and the port are intimately linked.

The book is structured into eight chapters, following a predominantly chronological sequence. It begins in the Middle Ages, using as a thread the episode of the transit of the ships of the Second Crusade from Dartmouth (England) to Gijón in 1147. Following this, the characteristics and conditions of the journey by sea from England to the northern Spanish coast are discussed, as well as the typology of the vessels and the changes in the shipping industry in Northern Europe. Following a collapse during the early medieval period, the city/port recovered its dynamism during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, becoming the most important centre in the region. Relations with England during this period are analysed – Gijón became a prominent trading port with England and had a notable English presence in its docks, carrying out both commercial